

Therapeutic Workplace

Brief Program Description

Drug abuse and addiction is at the root of a number of social economic and health problems in the United States and has often been described as a chronic relapsing disorder. This description derives from the idea that patterns of excessive drug use often recur despite interruptions by periods of abstinence. Reinforcement of drug abstinence is one of the most effective means of promoting abstinence in drug-dependent individuals. In abstinence reinforcement procedures, drug abuse patients experience some type of desirable event (e.g., receiving money or privileges) contingent on providing objective evidence of drug abstinence. The Therapeutic Workplace is a treatment designed specifically to address the chronic, persistent nature of drug addiction. This treatment has its foundation in operant conditioning and behavioral pharmacology and integrates proven abstinence reinforcement strategies into an employment setting.

In the Therapeutic Workplace, drug abuse patients are hired and paid to work. Participants are routinely required to provide drug-free urine sample to gain and maintain access to the workplace. Participants gain a salary as long as they remain drug-free, thus promoting drug abstinence. Voucher reinforcement was utilized to promote abstinence, and to maintain workplace attendance. In addition, voucher reinforcement was arranged to promote professional demeanor, learning and productivity. Patients earned monetary vouchers that could be exchanged for goods and services.

Program Strategies

The intervention had two phases. During Phase 1, participants were taught the skills they would need to perform office data entry jobs. Two types of teaching procedures were utilized; Direct Instruction and fluency training. Typing and keypad entry were taught with a computerized typing program. Participants were also taught to enter printed alphanumeric data into computer spreadsheet. Participants received voucher reinforcement for punctuality, professional demeanor, and learning and productivity.

In April 2000, a Phase 2 data entry business was opened and began employing successful Phase 1 Therapeutic Workplace participants. The data entry business is a small nonprofit business that provides data entry services for a fee to researchers. Participants were hired into the business as data entry operators and entered hand-written or printed information on forms or surveys into a custom double-data entry software application.

Population Focus

Participants were patients receiving treatment at the Center for Addiction and Pregnancy (CAP), a comprehensive treatment program for substance abusing pregnant women located in Baltimore Maryland. CAP patients were eligible for the study if they were between the ages of 18 and 50 years old, were unemployed, and currently receiving methadone maintenance treatment.

Suitable Settings

The intervention is suitable for an in-patient or out-patient type setting.

Required Resources

The Direct Instruction corrective reading and writing curriculum along with the Morningside reading, mathematics, and language fluency systems are required for instruction. The Therapeutic Workplace software application program is required for typing and keypad training and to operate the data entry business.

Implementation Timeline

Participants attended the Therapeutic Workplace 3 to 6 hours per day, Monday through Friday.

Outcomes

Evaluation of this program revealed the following:

- Therapeutic Workplace participants had almost twice the rate of cocaine-negative and opiate negative urine samples during the monthly assessments (54% and 60% respectively) than control participants (28% and 37% respectively).
- In the final month of the three-year period, only 25% of control participants were abstinent from cocaine and only 25% were abstinent from opiates compared to 55% and 60% of Therapeutic Workplace participants respectively.

Contact Information

For indepth information on this program, please use the contact listed below.

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